

Brett Guthrie Opening Statement 06/13/23

As Prepared for Delivery

Before we begin, I want to express my disappointment with our Democrat colleagues on the committee for choosing to go a partisan route after months of earnest, bipartisan work to reauthorize key programs to bolster our national biodefense and biosecurity preparedness.

Let me be very clear: This process is not about creating expansive reforms to the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or the National Institutes of Health. I think most can agree these agencies are in need of reform and improvement. But that should be done through a separate, robust process.

I am grateful to Representative Miller-Meeks for taking the lead on CDC reform by publicly issuing a Request for Information on CDC reform to a wide range of experts and stakeholders. I look forward to hearing from her about the responses she's received to her RFI and addressing many of the issues highlighted in a future CDC reform effort.

I also look forward to engaging with my colleagues on a comprehensive effort to examine the root causes of drug shortages and supply chain issues. There is broad consensus, most recently testified to by FDA Commissioner Califf, that these issues will ultimately remain unresolved until we address the underlying economic forces driving these shortages. We'll start that conversation today, and based on written testimony, it seems like we have work to do across the health subcommittee's jurisdiction that necessitates a separate process and larger conversation outside the scope of this reauthorization. So again – these efforts should be done through a separate process.

The legislation before us today is designed to generate broad consensus around streamlined improvements to our preparedness and response infrastructure at the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response or "ASPR." We are continuing our efforts to prepare for and respond more effectively to future public health security threats, including chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, cyberattacks, or another infectious disease outbreak. This is the [fourth](#) hearing the Energy and Commerce Committee has held in the 118th Congress related to our response framework. The steps we have taken thus far have been made in a largely bipartisan fashion, and I hope our Democrat colleagues will come back to the table and continue in that spirit.

Many of the bills today are bipartisan. This includes legislation focused on evaluating and shoring-up our diagnostic testing infrastructure and domestic manufacturing capacity for medical countermeasures during a public health emergency, which hampered our initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also have several pieces of legislation focused on improvements to our Strategic National Stockpile, including reaffirming our commitment to supporting state efforts, working to ensure streamlined insight into our stockpile supply chain, and clarifying ASPR's responsibility over the SNS. We are considering legislation to improve transparency and communication between our federal agencies and private sector partners, including establishing an Advisory Committee to provide a forum for private sector input, requiring more certainty around contracts with the SNS and BARDA, and ensuring BARDA has the authority to research and develop medical countermeasures against the most timely and constantly evolving threats.

We must also demand proper accountability and communication from our public health agencies to our constituents. All of us have heard from smart scientists, doctors, and community leaders whose voices can add valuable insight into the best way to respond to a public health threat based on the resources and challenges in their specific communities. That is why I am pleased to see Chair Rodgers' discussion draft to require CDC to issue good guidance practices included in the hearing today. This would establish public participation requirements prior to finalization or implementation of major guidance pushed out by the CDC, and clarifies that these guidances are nonbinding, do not create, restrict, or revoke any person's rights or responsibilities, and do not have the force or effect of law, building off a model that Congress used for FDA over 20 years ago. The public deserves to have visibility and a seat at the table to allow them to make the decisions best for themselves and their families.

To build on the importance of accountability and improved processes, I am proud to have partnered with Representative Peters on bipartisan legislation to examine HHS's existing data authorities and data collection efforts and the federal funds used for such purposes. Local authorities don't need new top-down, heavy-handed data sharing mandates that won't help them respond to their local needs. Nor should the American people's sensitive information be collected and potentially used in a punitive fashion. This bill will ensure the agency is held accountable for any overutilization of such authorities, including any redundancies. We've already heard from stakeholders how important this review is and so I am hopeful we can move it forward as part of this process.

In evaluating the current programs that provide the foundation for our nation's preparedness and response, Congress must ensure our role representing the voice of people all over this country is not ceded to federal bureaucrats. That is why I am pleased to lead two efforts to address this – one to establish a process allowing Congress to vote on whether to continue or terminate a Public Health Emergency after 6 months of declaration, and another to accelerate the timeline to require Senate confirmation of any CDC Director, effective June 1, 2023. In closing, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Representative Hudson, his staff, and our dedicated committee staff for their work over the past several months to deliver this strong discussion draft. I would encourage my colleagues to remain focused on the task at hand and leave political games at the door. We must ensure these critical preparedness and response activities are reauthorized in a timely manner. I am happy to get to work on other topics – as shown by the number of hearings and bills we've already moved through this subcommittee, but trying to load down this reauthorization with broader topics will only jeopardize its ultimate passage and the safety of the American people.

Let's work together to move a bipartisan, consensus-driven bill to the House floor as soon as possible.

Thank you, and I yield back.